

LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 528
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

Life of Shakespeare

(As Seen by Georg Brandes)

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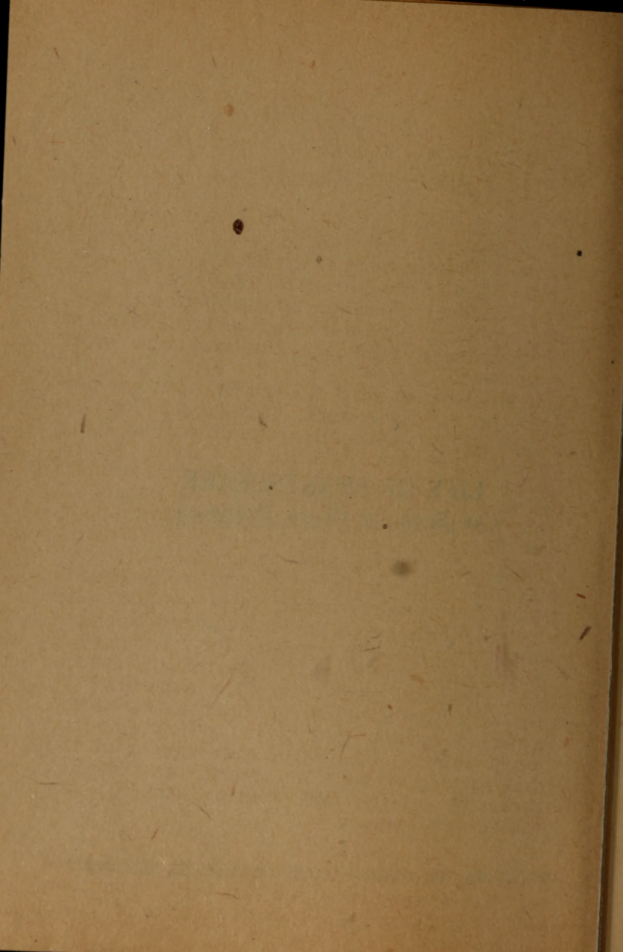
Julius Moritzen

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LIFE OF SHAKESPEARE
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LIFE OF SHAKESPEARE

The same year (1564) which saw the death of Michelangelo in Rome, saw the birth of William Shakespeare at Stratford-on-Avon. The great artist of the Italian Renaissance, the man who painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, was replaced, as it were, by the great artist of the English Renaissance, the man who wrote King Lear.

In the light of what George Brandes has presented in his latest work, *Michelangelo Buonarroti*, there is a peculiar timeliness in going back to the Danish critic's *William Shakespeare, a Critical Study*, for a reexamination of the various factors that went to the making of what unquestionably is one of the most important books ever written on the great English dramatist. The Pocket Series affords its readers full opportunity to enjoy Shakespeare's works in the most compact form available. As a companion piece, a guide as it were, to places where light is still requisite for the complete understanding of the poet's purpose, Brandes's Shakespeare is invaluable. The purpose of the present writer is to condense his interpretation in such a manner that the main points are retained for the benefit of the readers of the Shakespeare series. In America the English translation of the work was published by the Macmillan Company.

I.

Georg Brandes, with that critical instinct that has distinguished his career for more than half a century, is not in agreement with all

that had been written before he himself took Shakespeare for his study. It was to be expected that his interpretation would differ from that of certain scholars who failed to make the man and his work a unit. It is here that Brandes reveals his art as an analytical student of human nature and its vagaries. We see Shakespeare before us as he must have been. His plays take on a new importance as their creator is placed in close juxtaposition to his labors. When Georg Brandes brought out his Shakespeare a quarter of a century ago the English literary world was astonished that a foreigner could perform such a task with such excellent results. Of course, the author of "Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature" already had an international reputation. But to venture where so many great men had already added to Shakespeare through acknowledged erudition and profound research, that was something only the most daring would have cared to attempt. The honors bestowed on Brandes when subsequent to the publication of his Shakespeare he revisited London are sufficient commentary as to what the English nation thought of his achievement.

That a biography of Shakespeare is difficult, but not impossible, is the assertion of Georg Brandes. All ordinary critical methods he finds to be useless for the purpose of such a biography. It is a curious fact that while Shakespeare died in 1616, the first biography of him, a few pages in length, dates from 1709. This is as though the first sketch of Goethe's life were not to be written until the year 1925.

"It has become the fashion," Brandes asserts, "to say, not without some show of justice, that we know next to nothing of Shakespeare's life. We do not know for certain either when he left Stratford or when he returned to Stratford from London. We do not know for certain whether he ever went abroad, ever visited Italy. We do not know the name of a single woman whom he loved during all his years in London. We do not know for certain to whom his Sonnets are addressed. We can see that, as he advanced in years, his prevailing mood became gloomier, but we do not know the reason. Later on, his temper seems to grow more serene, but we cannot tell why. We can form but tentative conjectures as to the order in which his works were produced, and can only with the greatest difficulty determine their approximate dates. We do not know what made him so careless of his fame as he seems to have been. We only know that he himself did not publish his dramatic works, and that he does not even mention them in his will."

And yet, avers Brandes, enthusiastic and indefatigable research has gradually brought to light a great number of indubitable facts, which furnish points of departure and guidance for an outline of the poet's life. There are documents, contracts, legal records; utterances of contemporaries, allusions to works of Shakespeare and to passages in them, quotations, fierce attacks, outbursts of spite and hatred, touching testimonies to his worth as a man and to the loveliness of his nature, evidence of the early recognition of his talent as an

actor, of his repute as a narrative poet, and of his popularity as a dramatist. There are, moreover, one or two diaries kept by contemporaries, and among others the account-book of an old theatrical manager and pawnbroker, who supplied the players with money and dresses, and who has carefully dated the production of many plays.

Passing over Shakespeare's boyhood in Stratford, his marriage to Anne Hathaway when only eighteen years of age, a woman eight years his senior, let us with Brandes follow the coming poet to London. The picture that the critic presents teems with interest: "The London to which Shakespeare came was a town of about 300,000 inhabitants. Its main streets had quite recently been paved, but were not yet lighted; it was surrounded with trenches, walls, and gates; it had high-gabled, red-roofed, two-story wooden houses, distinguished by means of projecting signs, from which they took their names,—houses in which benches did duty for chairs, and the floors were carpeted with rushes.

"The streets were usually thronged, not with wheel-traffic, for the first carriage was imported into England in this very reign, but with people on foot, on horseback, or in litters; while the Thames, still blue and clear, in spite of the already large consumption of coal, was alive with thousands of boats threading their way, amid the watermen's shrill cries of 'Eastward hoe!' or 'Westward hoe!' through be vies of swans which put forth from, and returned

to, the green meadows and beautiful gardens bordering the stream."

II.

With such a picture of Shakespeare's London before us how much easier it is to visualize the England of the period. Brandes writes that it marked the country's development into a great Protestant power. With Elizabeth, Protestantism became a power in the world. The period of Shakespeare's arrival in London was momentous both in politics and religion.

"In 1585," writes Brandes, "Elizabeth opened war with Spain by sending her fleet to the Netherlands, with her favorite, Leicester, in command of the troops. In the beginning of the following year, Francis Drake, who in 1577-80 had for the first time circumnavigated the world, surprised and took San Domingo and Carthagen. The ship in which he had achieved his great voyage lay at anchor in the Thames as a memorial of the feat; it was often visited by Londoners, and no doubt by Shakespeare among them.

"In the years immediately following, the springtide of the national spirit burst into full bloom. Let us try to picture to ourselves the impression it must have made upon Shakespeare in the year 1587. On the 8th of February, 1587, Mary Stuart was executed at Fotheringay, and the breach between England and the Catholic world was thus made irreparable. On the 16th of February, England's noblest

knight and the flower of her chivalry, Sir Philip Sidney, the hero of Zutphen, and the chief of the Anglo-Italian school of poets, was buried in St. Paul's Cathedral, with a pomp which gave to the event the character of a national solemnity. Sidney was an ideal representative of the aristocracy of the day. He possessed the widest humanistic culture, had studied Aristotle and Plato no less than geometry and astronomy, had traveled and seen the world, had read and thought and written, and was not only a scholar but a soldier to boot. As a cavalry officer he had saved the English army at Gravelines, and he had been the friend and patron of Giordano Bruno, the freest thinker of his time. The Queen herself was present at his funeral, and so, no doubt, was Shakespeare."

In this way Georg Brandes leads us onward and onward to a point where the reader soon finds himself fortified with an historical background that gives that scenic effect to Shakespeare's plays which, in the opinion of some leading actors, makes stage scenery a by-thing. The self-sufficiency of a Shakespeare plot is not a new dictum. As with the reading of most of these plays, so it lies entirely with the acting to infuse them with the necessary life. Apparently, it was the purpose of Brandes to make his Shakespeare so much of a living thing that the possible stage effects would visualize themselves unconsciously, as it were, before the reader. In the more than 700 pages of this work he has made what the London Academy termed at the time of its appearance

"an admirable and exhaustive survey of its subject, carried in accordance with modern method, and on the level of modern information." To which the *Saturday Review* added that "his book sums up, with masterly lucidity, all that scholarship has contrived to secure regarding the life and aims of the greatest of poets. It is well that we possess at last a translation so eminently satisfactory of what is certainly the best existing general view of the life and labors of Shakespeare."

This word, lucidity, takes on a special importance in any discussion of the works of Georg Brandes. His style, as a matter of fact, is the quintessence of lucidity. With him thinking and writing are twin companions, inseparable, bound with ties that make of the whole a thing clearly outlined. In his Shakespeare this is particularly so. Whether it is the question of the poet's relations with his aristocratic patrons and his fellow actors; a discussion of the plays and sonnets, the political background or the psychological intent, there is this sharply defined presentment which means so much to anyone desirous of obtaining the full effect of reading.

III.

It is a well-known tradition that Shakespeare was driven by dire necessity to hang about the theater after his arrival in London and hold the horses of those who had ridden to the play. The district was a remote and disreputable one, and swarmed with horse thieves.

Shakespeare won such favor as a horse-holder and was in such general demand, that he had to engage boys as assistants, who announced themselves as "Shakespeare's boys," a style and title, it is said, which long clung to them.

As actor and retoucher of old plays, Shakespeare early attracted attention. The company to which he became attached employed him to revise and furbish up the older pieces of their repertory. Brandes avers that in view of the time, theatrical productions as a whole were not classed as literature. Poets sold their works outright to the theater for such sums as five or ten pounds, or for a share in the receipts. As the interests of the theater demanded that plays should not be printed, in order that rival companies might not obtain possession of them, they remained in manuscript (unless pirated), and the players could accordingly do what they pleased with the text.

It is proved by several passages in contemporary writings that, partly as actor and partly as adapter of older plays, Shakespeare had, at the age of twenty-eight, made a certain name for himself. He had already become the object of envy and hatred. "On the other hand," writes Brandes, "we see that not only Shakespeare's genius, but his personal amiability, the loftiness and charm of his nature, disarmed even those who for one reason or another had spoken disparagingly of his activity. As Chettle, after printing Greene's attack, hastened to make public apology, so also Ben Jonson, to whose ill-will and cutting allusions

Shakespeare made no retort, became, in spite of an unconquerable jealousy, his true friend and admirer, and after his death spoke of him warmly in prose, and with enthusiasm in verse, in the noble eulogy prefixed to the First Folio. . .

"Between 1586 and 1592," Brandes declares further, "we lose all trace of Shakespeare. We know only that he must have been an active member of a company of players. It is not proved that he ever belonged to any other company than the Earl of Leicester's, which owned the Blackfriars, and afterwards the Globe theater."

Speaking of the theaters, in the City itself none were tolerated. The civic authorities regarded them with an unfriendly eye, and had banished them to the outskirts and across the Thames, together with the rough amusements with which they had to compete; cock-fighting and bear-baiting with dogs. There was as yet only one bridge across the Thames, the mighty London Bridge, situated not far from that which now bears the name. It was broad and lined with buildings; while on the tall gate-towers heads which had fallen on the block were almost always displayed. In its neighborhood lay Eastcheap, the street in which stood Falstaff's tavern.

The central points of London were at that time the newly erected Exchange and St. Paul's Church, which was regarded not only as the Cathedral of the city, but as a meeting place and promenade for idlers, a sort of club where

the news of the day was to be heard, a hiring-fair for servants, and a sanctuary for debtors who were there secure from arrest.

How picturesquely all this is set forth by Brandes: "The streets, still full of the many-colored life of the Renaissance, rang with the cries of 'prentices inviting customs and hawkers proclaiming their wares; while through them passed many a procession, civil, ecclesiastical, or military, bridal companies, pageants, and troops of crossbow-men and men-at-arms. Elizabeth herself might be met in the streets, driving her huge State carriage, when she did not prefer to sail on the Thames in her magnificent gondola, followed by a crowd of gaily decorated boats. . . .

"The handsome, parti-colored, extravagant costumes of the period are well known. The puffed sleeves of the men, the women's stiff ruffs, and the fantastic shapes of their hooped skirts, are still to be seen in the stage presentations of plays of the time. The Queen and her Court set the example of great and unreasonable luxury with respect to the number and material of costumes. The ladies rouged their faces, and often dyed their hair. Auburn, as the Queen's color, was the most fashionable. The conveniences of daily life were very meagre. Only of late had fireplaces begun to be substituted for the open hearths. Only of late had proper bedsteads come into general use. When Shakespeare's well-to-do grandfather, Richard Arden, made his will, in the year 1556, there was only one bedstead in the house where he lived with his seven daugh-

ters. People slept on straw mattresses, with a billet of wood under their heads and a fur rug over them. The only decoration of the rooms of the wealthier classes was the tapestry on the walls, behind which people so often conceal themselves in Shakespeare's plays."

There is a further description of the manner of living at the time which aids materially in giving reality to Shakespeare's plays, although not always revealed on the stage: "The dinner hour was at that time eleven in the morning, and it was reckoned fashionable to dine early. Those who could afford it ate rich and heavy dishes; the repasts would often last an inordinate time, and no regard whatever was paid to the minor decencies of life. Domestic utensils were very mean. So late as 1592, wooden trenchers, wooden platters and wooden spoons were in common use. It was just about this time that tin and silver began to supplant wood. Table knives had been in general use since about 1563, but forks were still unknown in Shakespeare's time—fingers supplied their place."

Georg Brandes, realizing the love element in almost all that Shakespeare produced early in his book discusses the poet's conception as to the relations of the sexes. It is one of the most interesting parts of the entire work. He speaks here of *Venus and Adonis*, published in the spring of 1593, when Shakespeare was twenty-nine years old. He took two lines from Ovid's *Amores* as the motto of the poem. Among the poets of antiquity Ovid is naturally his model.

Brandes is of the opinion that after coming to London, Shakespeare took his marriage to a woman eight years his senior as a piece of youthful folly. A close study of his works confirms this conjecture. There are in *Twelfth Night* certain passages that show this personal regret at the memory of his early marriage and the circumstances under which it came about. *The Tempest* is another instance where, as in Prospero's warning to Ferdinand, Shakespeare shows a growing tendency to have the love element predominate on equal terms and without compulsion.

IV.

Shakespeare early realized that in spite of the fame and popularity that such a poem as *Venus and Adonis* brought him it was not narrative but dramatic poetry which offered the fullest scope for his powers.

"And now it is that we find him for the first time rising to the full height of his genius," declares Brandes. "This he does in a work of dramatic form; but significantly enough, it is not as yet in its dramatic elements that we recognize the master-hand, but rather in the rich and incomparable lyric poetry with which he embroiders a thin dramatic canvas.

"His first is a masterpiece of grace, both lyrical and comic. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was no doubt written as a festival-play or masque, before the masque became an established art-form, to celebrate the marriage of a noble patron. . . . We have here no

pathos. The hurricane of passion does not as yet sweep through Shakespeare's work. No; it is only the romantic and imaginative side of love that is here displayed, the magic whereby longing transmutes and idealizes its object, the element of folly, infatuation and illusion in desire, with its consequent variability and transitoriness."

Very interesting is the way that Brandes characterizes *Romeo and Juliet* as the drama of youthful and impulsive love-at-first-sight, "so passionate that it bursts every barrier in its path; so determined that it knows no middle way between happiness and death, so strong that it throws the lovers into each other's arms with scarcely a moment's pause, and, lastly, so ill-fated that death follows straightway upon the ecstasy of the union."

How succinctly the Danish critic here tells with a few well directed strokes the life-story of youthful love self-consumed through the very fervor of the principals. *Romeo and Juliet* retains its hold on the imagination because of its fidelity to truth. His material enables Shakespeare to place his love-story in the setting best fitted to throw into relief the beauty of the emotion, using as his background a vendetta between two noble families, which has grown from generation to generation through one sanguinary reprisal after another, until it has actually infected the whole town around them. According to the traditions of the race the lovers ought to hate each other. The fact that, on the contrary, they are so passionately drawn together in mutual ecstasy bears witness from

the outset to the strength of an emotion which not only neutralizes prejudice in their own minds, but continues to assert itself in opposition to the prejudices of their surroundings.

There are several good reasons why *Love's Labor Lost* no doubt is Shakespeare's earliest comedy. As a counterpart to this he soon after wrote *Love's Labours Won*. As we know, no play of that name is now included in Shakespeare's works. But Brandes is of the opinion that it is scarcely conceivable that one of his plays, once acted, should have been entirely lost, and he believes that *Love's Labor's Won* is *All's Well that Ends Well*, but with many revisions.

Let us now with Brandes take a look into the theaters of Shakespeare's time. "On swampy ground beside the Thames lay the theaters," we read, "of which the largest were wooden sheds, only half thatched with rushes, with a trench around them and a flagstaff on the roof. After the middle of the fifteen-seventies, when the first was built, they shot up rapidly. and in the early years of the new century theater-building took such a start that, as we learn from Prynne's '*Histriomastix*,' there were in 1633 no fewer than nineteen permanent theaters in London, a number which no modern town of 300,000 inhabitants can equal. These figures show how keen and how widespread was the interest in the drama. . . . The days of performance at these theaters were announced by the hoisting of a flag on the roof. The time of beginning was three o'clock punctually and the performance went straight on, uninterrupted by entr'actes. It lasted as a rule

for only two hours, or two hours and a half. Close to the Globe Theater lay the Bear Garden, the rank smell from which greeted the nostrils, even before it came in sight. The famous bear, Sackerson, who is mentioned in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, now and then broke his chain and put female theater-goers shriekingly to flight.

"Tickets there were none. A penny was the price of admission to standing room in the yard; and those who wanted better places put their money in a box held out to them for that purpose, the amount varying from a penny to a half-crown, in accordance with the places required."

That much was left to the imagination of the audience and that the audience was fully prepared to utilize this imagination to the full is asserted by Brandes as he shows with what crude accessories the plays were staged. The walls were either hung with loose tapestries or quite uncovered, so that the wooden doors which led to the players' rooms at the back were clearly visible. In battle scenes, whole armies entered triumphant, or were driven off in confusion and defeat, though a single door. When a tragedy was acted the stage was usually hung in black; for a comedy the hangings were blue. As in the theater of antiquity, rude machines were employed to raise or lower actors through the stage; trap-doors were certainly in use, and probably "bridges" or small platforms, which could be elevated into the upper regions. It was Inigo Jones who first introduced movable scenery and decorations

at the court entertainments. They were certainly not in use at the popular playhouses at any time during Shakespeare's connection with the stage, avers Brandes.

Here is an interesting picture of one of the Shakespeare audiences as visualized by Georg Brandes: "In the boxes sat the better sort of spectators, officers, city merchants, sometimes with their wives; but ladies always wore a mask of silk or velvet, partly for protection against sun and air, partly in order to blush (or not to blush) unseen, at the frivolous and often licentious things that were said upon the stage. The mask was then as common an article of female attire as is the veil in our days. But the front rows of what we should now call the first tiers were occupied by beauties who had no desire whatever to conceal their countenances, though they might use the mask (as in later times the fan) for purposes of coquetry. These were the kept mistresses of men of quality, and other gorgeously decked ladies, who resorted to the playhouse in order to make acquaintances. Behind them sat the respectable citizens. But in the gallery above a rougher element assembled—sailors, artisans, soldiers and loose women of the lowest class.

"No woman ever appeared on the stage. The frequenters of the pit, with their coarse boisterousness, were the terror of the actors. They all had to stand—coalheavers and bricklayers, dock laborers, serving-men and idlers. Refreshment-sellers moved about among them, supplying them with sausages and ale, with apples and nuts. They ate and drank, drew

corks, smoked tobacco, fought with each other, and often, when they were out of humor, threw fragments of food, and even stones, at the actors. Now and then they would come to loggerheads with the fine gentlemen on the stage, so that the performance had to be interrupted and the theater closed."

V.

It is not the present purpose to take each of Shakespeare's plays and see what Brandes has to say about it. That would involve a task as unnecessary as it would be difficult within the prescribed limits of a Haldeman-Julius booklet, which first of all means compactness. However, there are certain high lights that shine with a refulgence all their own and with which the general public has acquaintance. Here the Brandes viewpoint should be of particular interest since it affords opportunity of comparison with other leading Shakespearean scholars' opinion.

Romeo and Juliet, because of its popularity, is just such a play as might induce a critic like Georg Brandes to give it his special attention. In its original form, he opines, the play must be assumed to date from 1591, from Shakespeare's twenty-seventh year. The First Quarto of *Romeo and Juliet* was published in 1597. But even if the dramatist began to work upon the theme in 1591, there appears to be little doubt that Shakespeare, according to his frequent practice, went through the play again, revised and remolded it, somewhere between that date and 1599, when it appeared in the

Second Quarto almost in the form in which we now possess it.

"*Romeo and Juliet*," Brandes remarks, "is perhaps not such a flawless work of art as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It is not so delicately, so absolutely harmonious. But it is an achievement of much greater significance and moment; it is the great and typical love-tragedy of the world. It soars immeasurably above all later attempts to approach it."

Shakespeare was thirty years old when he turned to the historic drama. He begins to occupy himself in earnest with history, reading the chronicles, to project and work out a whole series of historical plays. Brandes affirms that Shakespeare's plays founded on English history and numbering ten in all, are of a very unequal value, and can by no means be treated as standing on one plane.

Richard III appears to interest Brandes especially. "The text of *Richard III*," he says, "presents no slight difficulties to the editors of Shakespeare. Neither the First Quarto nor the greatly amended Folio is free from gross and baffling errors. The editors of the Cambridge Edition have attempted to show that both texts are taken from bad copies of the original manuscripts. It would not surprise us, indeed, that the poet's own manuscript, being perpetually handled by the prompter and stage-manager, should quickly become so ragged that now one page and now another would have to be replaced by a copy."

Everyone who has been nurtured upon Shakespeare has from his youth dwelt wonderingly

upon the figure of Richard, "that fiend in human shape, striding with savage impetuosity, from murder to murder, wading through falsehood and hypocrisy to ever-new atrocities, becoming in turn regicide, fratricide, tyrant, murderer of his wife and of his comrades, until, besmirched with treachery and slaughter, he faces his foes with invincible greatness." Into this character, Brandes adds, "Shakespeare transforms himself in imagination. It is the mark of the dramatic poet to be always able to get out of his own skin and into another's. But in later times some of the greatest dramatists have shrunk shuddering from the out-and-out criminal, as being too remote for them. For example, Goethe. His wrong-doers are only weaklings, like Weislingen and Clavigo; even his Mephistopheles is not really evil. Shakespeare, on the other hand, made the effort to feel like Richard.

"How did he set about it? Exactly as we do when we strive to understand another personality; for example, Shakespeare himself. He imagines himself into him; that is to say, he projects his mind into the other's body and lives in it for the time being. The question the poet has to answer is always this: How should I feel and act if I were a prince, a woman, a conqueror, an outcast, and so forth? Shakespeare takes, as his point of departure, the ignominy inflicted by Nature; Richard is one of Nature's victims."

How can Shakespeare feel with him here, asks Brandes.—Shakespeare to whom deformity of body was unknown, and who had been

immoderately favored by Nature? But he, too, had long endured humiliation, and had lived under mean conditions which afforded no scope either to his will or to his talents. Poverty is itself a deformity; and the condition of an actor was a blemish like a hump on his back. Thus he is in a position to enter with ease into the feelings of one of Nature's victims. He has simply to give free course to all the moods in his own mind which have been evoked by personal humiliation, and to let them ferment and run riot.

Who that has seen or read *Richard III*, (and who has not?) will at once perceive why Shakespeare managed to infuse such realism into that tragedy built on historic facts. So also, the Brandes interpretation reveals a psychological intent on the part of the Bard of Avon. Here, as perhaps nowhere else in Shakespeare, excepting *King Lear*, fear and trembling, coupled with almost unbelievable cruelty, underlie the actions of those characters through whom the dramatist sought to make them stand forth as object lessons.

It is true that Shakespeare was no miniature-painter. Minutely detailed psychological painting, such as in the case of Dostoevski, was not his affair. And yet he showed in *Hamlet* what he could do with complex characters. Richard he builds up from a few simple characteristics: deformity, the potent consciousness of intellectual superiority, and the lust for power. His whole personality can be traced back to these simple elements. He is courageous out of self-esteem; he plays the lover out of

ambition; he is cunning and false, a comedian and a blood-hound, as cruel as he is hypocritical—and all in order to attain to that despotism on which he had set his heart.

"In no other play of Shakespeare's, we may surely say," writes Brandes, "is the leading character so absolutely predominant as here. He absorbs almost the whole of the interest, and it is a triumph of Shakespeare's art that he makes us, in spite of everything, follow him with sympathy. This is partly because several of his victims are so worthless that their fate seems well deserved. Anne's weakness deprives us of our sympathy, and Richard's crime loses something of its horror when we see how lightly it is forgiven by the one who ought to take it most to heart. In spite of all his iniquities, he has wit and courage on his side—a wit which sometimes rises to Mephistophelian humor, a courage which does not fail him even in the moment of disaster, but sheds a glory over his fall which is lacking to the triumph of his coldly correct opponent. However false and hypocritical he may be towards others, he is no hypocrite to himself."

VI.

Brandes calls *King Lear* the tragedy of a world-catastrophe. "I imagine," he says, "that Shakespeare must, as a rule, have worked early in the morning. The division of the day at that time would necessitate this. But it can scarcely have been in bright morning hours, scarcely in the daytime, that he conceived *King*

Lear. No; it must have been on a night of storm and terror, one of those nights when a man, sitting at his desk at home, thinks of the wretches who are wandering in houseless poverty through the darkness—the blustering wind, and the soaking rain—when the rushing of the storm over the house-tops and its howling in the chimneys sound in his ears like shrieks of agony, the wail of all the misery of earth.”

It is nothing less than the social question, as we understand it to-day, that Shakespeare presents in *King Lear*; the extreme wretchedness and want that underlie so many problems of the present as they must have been in evidence also in his day. *Lear* says in the play: “You see how this world goes.” Nowhere else is evil and good shown in such immediate opposition. Everything centers in the protagonist, poor, stupid, great *Lear*, every inch a king, and every inch human.

“At heart he is so lovable,” affirms Brandes, “that he arouses the unalterable devotion of the best among those who surround him; and he is so framed to command and accustomed to rule, that he misses every moment that power which, in an access of caprice, he has renounced. For a brief space at the beginning of the play the old man stands erect; then he begins to bend. And the weaker he grows the heavier the load heaped upon him, till at last, overburdened, he sinks. He wanders off, groping his way, with his crushing fate upon his back. Then the light of his mind is extinguished; madness seizes him. . . .

“The end of all things seems to have come

when we see the ruin of the moral world—when he who is noble and trustful like Lear is rewarded with ingratitude and hate; when he who is honest and brave like Kent is punished with dishonor; when he who is merciful like Gloucester, taking the suffering and injured under his roof, has the loss of his eyes for his reward; when he who is noble and faithful like Edgar must wander about in the semblance of a maniac with a rag round his loins, when, finally she who is the living emblem of womanly dignity and of filial tenderness towards an old father who has become as it were a child—when she meets her death before his eyes at the hands of assassins! What avails it that the guilty slaughter and poison each other afterwards? None the less is this the titanic tragedy of human life; there rings forth from it a chorus of passionate, jeering, wildly yearning and desperately wailing voices.

“Sitting by his fire at night, Shakespeare heard them in the roar of the storm against the window-pane, in the howling of the wind in the chimneys—heard all these terrible voices contrapuntally interwoven one with another as in a fugue, and heard in them the torture-shriek of suffering humanity.”

It goes without saying that Cordelia appeals vastly to Brandes as a character whose sacrifices deserved better than was her lot. While the elder daughters have inherited and overdeveloped Lear's bad qualities, Cordelia has fallen heir to his goodness of heart; but he has also transmitted to her a certain obstinacy and pride, but for which the conflict would not have

arisen. How touching is the passage where Cordelia finds her brain-sick sire, and tends him until, by aid of the healing art, and sleep, and music, he slowly regains his health. That this old man should lose his youngest daughter—this is the catastrophe which Shakespeare has made so great that it is with reason Kent asks: "Is this the promised end? Is this the end of the world?"

"The loss of Cordelia," concludes Brandes's comment on this great tragedy, "that is the great catastrophe. We all lose, or live under the dread of losing, our Cordelia. The loss of the dearest and the best, of that which alone makes life worth living—that is the tragedy of life. Hence the question: Is this the end of the world? Yes, it is. Each of us has only his world, and lives with the threat of its destruction hanging over him. And in the year 1606 Shakespeare was in no mood to write other than dramas on the doom of worlds."

VII.

Passing from the sombre to the gay, from Shakespeare's *King Lear* to his immortal Falstaff, what a picture is Brandes's characterization as he turns his searchlight on a personality that stands for all time as the embodiment of mirth and the grotesque. But the Danish critic would not be what he is did he not furnish us with much more than a mere study of Falstaff as Falstaff. No, Brandes takes us into the Shakespearean inner circle, into the tavern life of the day, makes us acquainted with the

young aristocrats who, in Shakespeare, appear under the names of Mercutio and Benedick, Gratiano and Lorenzo, these gay fellows of the upper world who made pleasure their whole pursuit.

"Dressed in silk or ash-colored velvet," Brandes writes, "and with gold lace on his cloak, the young man of fashion began by riding to St. Paul's and promenading half-a-dozen times up and down its middle aisle. He then 'repaired to the Exchange, and talked pretty euphuisms to the citizens' daughters,' or looked in at the bookseller's to inspect the latest play-book or pamphlet against tobacco. Next he rode to the ordinary where he had appointed to meet his friends and dine. At dinner he discussed Drake's expedition to Portugal, or Essex's exploits at Cadiz, or told how he had broken a lance with Raleigh himself at the Tilt-yard. He would mingle snatches of Italian and Spanish with his talk, and let himself be persuaded, after dinner, to recite a sonnet of his own composition. At three he betook himself to the theater, saw Burbage as Richard III, and applauded Kemp in his new jig; after which he would spend an hour at the bear-garden. Then to the barber's, to have his hair and beard trimmed, in preparation for the carouse of the evening at whichever tavern he and his friends had selected—the 'Mitre,' the 'Falcon,' the 'Apollo,' the 'Boar's Head,' the 'Devil,' or—most famous of all—the 'Mermaid,' where the literary club, the 'Syren,' founded by none other than Sir Walter Raleigh himself, held its meetings."

This, then, was the environment of Shakespeare's Falstaff. Here also, the young aristocrat rubs shoulders with the leading players, such as Burbage and Kemp, and with the best known men of letters, such as John Lyly, George Chapman, John Florio, Michael Drayton, Samuel Daniel, John Marston, Thomas Nash, Ben Jonson, William Shakespeare.

"To Shakespeare's circle Chettle must doubtless have belonged," Brandes comments, "that Chettle who in bygone days had published Greene's *Groatsworth of Wit*, and afterwards made amends to Shakespeare for Greene's coarse attack upon him. In Dekker's tract, *A Knight's Conjuring*, dating from 1607, he figures among the poets in Elysium, where he is introduced in the following terms: 'In comes Chettle sweating and blowing, by reason of his fatness; to welcome whom, because hee was of olde acquaintance, all rose up, and fell presentlie on their knees, to drinck a health to all the louers of Hellicon.'

"Elze has conjectured, possibly with justice, that in this puffing and sweating old ton of flesh, who is so whimsically greeted with mock reverence by the whole gay company, we have the very model from whom Shakespeare drew his demigod, the immortal Sir John Falstaff, beyond comparison the gayest, the most concrete, and most entertaining figure in European comedy. In his close-woven and unflagging mirthfulness, in the inexhaustible wealth of drollery concentrated in his person, Falstaff surpasses all that antiquity and the Middle Ages have produced in the way of comic char-

acter, and all that the stage of later times can show."

Brandes takes occasion to bring Rabelais upon the scene for the purpose of comparing Shakespeare's Falstaff with the other's Panurge. Rabelais, of course, was the master spirit of the early Renaissance in France. Brandes says that when we compare Falstaff with Panurge we see that Rabelais stands to Shakespeare in the relation of a Titan to an Olympian god. Rabelais is gigantic, disproportioned, potent, but formless. Shakespeare is smaller and less excessive, poorer in ideas, though richer in fancies, and moulded with the utmost firmness of outline.

In 1598 appeared a Quarto with the following title: "The History of Henrie the Fourth; With the battell of Shrewsburie, betweene the King and Lord Henry Percy, surnamed Henrie Hotspur of the North. With the humorous conceits of Sir John Falstaffe. At London. Printed by P. S. for Andrew Wise, dwelling in Paules Churchyard, at the signe of the Angell. 1598." This was the first part of Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, which must have been written in 1597—the play in which Shakespeare first attains his great and overwhelming individuality. At the age of thirty-three, he stands for the first time at the summit of his artistic greatness.

In the original form of *Henry IV*, we learn, Falstaff's name was Sir John Oldcastle. Under the name of Falstaff he became, after the lapse of half a century, the most popular of Shakespeare's creations. Between 1642 and 1694, he is more frequently mentioned than any other of

Shakespeare's characters. He was, according to Brandes, "the wine-god of merry England at the meeting of the centuries." Never before or since has England enjoyed so many sorts of beverages. There was ale, and all other kinds of strong and small beer, and apple-drink, and honey-drink, and strawberry-drink, and three sorts of mead—meath, metheglin, hydromel—and every drink was fragrant of flowers and spiced with herbs. In white meath alone there was infused rosemary and thyme, sweet-briar, pennyroyal, bays, water-cresses, agrimony, marsh-mallow, liverwort, maiden-hair, betony, eye-bright, scabious, ash-leaves, ringo root, wild angelica, rib-wort, sennicle, Roman wormwood, tamarisk, mother thyme, saxifrage, philipendula; and strawberries and violet leaves were often added. Cherry wine and sack were mixed with gillyflower syrup.

Is it to be wondered that an age that produced such a profusion of beverages could bring forth a character like Falstaff? There were fifty-six varieties of French wine in use, and thirty-six of Spanish and Italian, to say nothing of the many home-made kinds. But among the foreign wines none was so famous as Falstaff's favorite sherrisack. It took its name from Xeres in Spain, but differed from the modern sherry in being a sweet wine.

"Falstaff is a great wine-knower," Brandes declares, "but he is infinitely more than that. He is one of the brightest and wittiest spirits England has ever produced. He is one of the most glorious creations that ever sprang from a poet's brain. There is much rascality and

much genius in him, but there is no trace of mediocrity. He is always superior to his surroundings, always resourceful, always witty, always at his ease, often put to shame, but thanks to his inventive effrontery, never put out of countenance. He has fallen below his social position; he lives in the worst—though also in the best—society; he has neither soul, nor honor, nor moral sense; but he sins, robs, lies, and boasts, with such splendid exuberance, and is so far above any serious attempt at hypocrisy, that he seems unfailingly amiable whatever he may choose to do. Therefore he charms every one, although he is a butt for the wit of all. He perpetually surprises us by the wealth of his nature. He is old and youthful, corrupt and harmless, cowardly and daring, 'a knave without malice, a liar without deceit; and a knight, a gentleman and a soldier, without either dignity, decency or honor.' The young Prince shows good taste in always and in spite of everything seeking out his company."

VIII.

The same creative spirit that produced such a rollicking character as Falstaff gave Shylock to the world. And what a contrast is here presented. *The Merchant of Venice* is perhaps that of Shakespeare's plays which gives earliest intimation of the author as a man of business. The date of its composition is no doubt around 1597. *The Taming of the Shrew* preceded it about a year. It is beyond question that Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* gave Shakespeare his first literary impulse towards *The Merchant of*

Venice. Barabas is a Jew and usurer, like Shylock. Like Shylock he has a daughter who is in love with a poor Christian; and like him, he thirsts for revenge. But he is a monster, not a man.

Brandes presents Shylock as a character as much to be pitied almost as shunned. "While Marlowe," he says, "according to his custom, made his Barabas revel in mythological similes, Shakespeare indicates that Shylock's culture is founded entirely upon the Old Testament and makes commerce his only point of contact with the civilization of later times. All his parallels are drawn from the Patriarchs and the Prophets. . . . He is no wild animal; he is no heathen who simply gives the rein to his natural instincts; his hatred is not ungoverned; he restrains it within its legal rights, like a tiger in its cage. He is entirely lacking, indeed, in the freedom and serenity, the easy-going, light-hearted carelessness which characterizes a ruling caste in its virtues and its vices, in its charities and in its prodigalities; but he has not a single twinge of conscience about anything that he does; his actions are in perfect harmony with his ideals.

"Sundered from the regions, the social forms, the language, in which his spirit is at home, he has yet retained his Oriental character. Passion is the kernel of his nature. It is his passion that has enriched him; he is passionate in action, in calculation, in sensation, in hatred, in revenge, in everything. His vengefulness is many times greater than his rapacity. Avari-

cious though he be, money is nothing to him in comparison with revenge.

"It is not until he is exasperated by his daughter's robbery and flight that he takes such hard measures against Antonio, and refuses to accept three times the amount of the loan. His conception of honor may be unchivalrous enough, but, such as it is, his honor is not to be bought for money. His hatred of Antonio is far more intense than his love for his jewels; and it is this passionate hatred, not avarice, that makes him the monster he becomes.'

The question naturally arises whether Georg Brandes's Jewish antecedents have in any way influenced him in his depiction of Shakespeare's vengeful Jew. We know, of course, that religion plays no part in Brandes's spiritual makeup. He avows adherence to no creed or dogma. Again and again he has proclaimed the fact that mankind has a right to believe as it prefers. For himself, the mentality of the old Greeks appears to have been transplanted in the mind of this Danish critic who is perhaps considerably of a stoic.

It is no secret that when Brandes began to attract attention as a writer of unusual talent he met with an opposition in his home country that could hardly fail to cause embitterment. His lectures at the University of Copenhagen had aroused the orthodox element of Denmark and his liberal viewpoints were termed nothing less than an absolute departure from what was in that day thought right and proper. We may be sure that Shakespeare's *Merchant of*

Venice came before his mental vision many times as an example of what religious bigotry may accomplish in the case of one who has been declared as standing apart from his fellow men. Shylock's vehemence unquestionably seemed justified to a degree in the eyes of the Danish critic who nearly half a century ago was perfecting the material that went to the making of his epochal "Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature."

At this juncture it may not be amiss to digress for a moment from a consideration of Brandes's *Shakespeare* and turn to his *Lord Beaconsfield*. This biography of Benjamin Disraeli, Brandes wrote some time before 1880, the American translation appearing in that year. Here there are unmistakable signs of Brandes's bitter arraignment of those who would look down upon others not of the same religious belief as they. Every novel that Brandes here passes in review as explaining the ambitious plans of him who later was to rule the British empire as Prime Minister, bears the indubitable stamp of defense of the religion that Disraeli's forebears disavowed for reasons bordering on expediency. Lord Beaconsfield, however, never seemed to have forgotten that he sprang from the race that gave to the world the Savior of Christianity.

Benjamin Disraeli, writes Brandes, was a descendant of one of the Jewish families compelled by the Spanish Inquisition to leave the Peninsula towards the end of the fifteenth century. These families, who, although expelled from Palestine, had never wandered from the

originally civilized countries of ancient times—those in the Mediterranean basin, and who had never been exposed to a rigid climate—formed for a long time the natural aristocracy of the Jewish people. They had resided, happy and respected, partly in the large cities, partly on their estates in Aragon, Andalusia, and Portugal, for the acquisition of landed property was not then denied them.

“Fanaticism afterwards deprived them, by one blow, of all their rights and hopes,” Brandes declares. “Lord Beaconsfield’s ancestors, therefore, took refuge in the Venetian Republic, and, according to a family tradition, as soon as they trod the soil of Venice, renounced their Spanish name, and, “from gratitude to the God of Jacob, who had led them through unexampled trials and unheard-of dangers,” took the name of d’Israeli, by which the family was henceforth to be known. It grew and flourished without let or hindrance for more than two hundred years.

We next read how toward the end of the eighteenth century, a member of the family resolved to send his youngest son, Benjamin, to England, which seemed then to secure religious liberty to the Jews, and offered a favorable opening for commercial undertakings on a large scale. Religious liberty, however, was neither of long standing nor complete in England. The Jews had been expelled from the country long before they had been driven from Spain or Portugal.

“It was not until the time of the Commonwealth that protected by Cromwell himself,

though not by any law, the Jews began to return to England," says Brandes. "Under George II, the Minister, Lord Pelham, was favorable to them, and during his ministry, Benjamin d'Israeli, the grandfather and namesake of Lord Beaconsfield, became, in the year 1748, an English citizen, without civil rights."

Benjamin Disraeli was the son of Isaac d'Israeli. His mother was Maria Basevi. The boy was received into the Jewish community; but when his father afterwards separated himself from it, if reports speak truly, avers Brandes, he gave his friend Samuel Rogers leave to take him to church and have him baptized. Rogers was totally indifferent to religion, but it seemed to him a pity—so it is said—that this fine, intelligent boy should be excluded by his creed from the most important and highest social advantages. At any rate, the baptism took place in the parish of St. Andrews, on the thirty-first of July, 1817.

What Benjamin Disraeli nevertheless suffered of ignominy because of his Jewish parentage, Brandes emphasizes as he considers *Vivian Grey* and *Contarini Fleming*, both as literary productions and as autobiographical novels in which the future Lord Beaconsfield gets back at those who hurled insult against him in his boyhood days. It is as a champion of religious liberty that Brandes with evident relish enters into a detailed account of Disraeli's heroës. It all has a tendency towards showing how much the Danish critic had stored up of literary equipment when finally the day came for him to treat of Shakespeare on a large scale and

with Shylock, one of the outstanding figures in his gallery of portraits.

IX.

And now as to *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. It is not for nothing that Shakespeare's immortal tragedy caused Brandes to devote so much of his book to the Melancholy Dane.

"Many and various emotions crowded upon Shakespeare's mind in the year 1601," we learn. "In its early months Essex and Southampton were condemned. At exactly the same time there occurs the crisis in the relations of Pembroke and Shakespeare with the Dark Lady. Finally, in the early autumn, Shakespeare suffered a loss which he must have felt deeply. The Stratford register of burials for 1601 contains this line:

"September 8, Mr. Johannes Shakespeare.

"He lost his father, his earliest friend and guardian, whose honor and reputation lay so near to his heart. The father probably lived with his son's family in the handsome New Place, which Shakespeare had bought four years before. He had doubtless brought up the two girls Susanna and Judith; he had doubtless sat by the death-bed of the little Hamnet. Now he was no more. All the years of his youth, spent at his father's side, revived in Shakespeare's mind, memories flocked in upon him, the fundamental relations between son and father preoccupied his thought, and he fell to brooding over filial love and filial reverence. In the same year *Hamlet* began to take shape in Shakespeare's imagination."

It is with particular interest that we approach Brandes's interpretation of the Hamlet character. Not only because the critic, himself a Dane, may be expected to have analyzed most thoroughly the fundamental reasons why Shakespeare chose Denmark for the tragedy's environment, but also because, in following Brandes here, we are able to gain a clearer insight into his own character.

The chapters devoted to Hamlet occur in almost the middle of the book and occupy a large space. First we have Hamlet: Its Antecedents in Fiction, History and the Drama; next Hamlet—Montaigne and Giordano Bruno—Traits of Danish Manners; again, The Personal Element in Hamlet; then, in succession, The Psychology of Hamlet, Hamlet as a Drama, Hamlet and Ophelia, Hamlet's Influence on Later Times, finally, Hamlet as a Critic.

Hamlet as a critic! Brandes as a critic of Hamlet. What then do we find? We read: "Along with motives from novel, drama and history, impressions of a philosophical and quasi-scientific order went to the making of *Hamlet*. Of all Shakespeare's plays, this is the profoundest and most contemplative; a philosophical atmosphere breathes around it. . . In approaching the theme Shakespeare obeyed a fundamental instinct in his nature; and as he worked it out, everything that stood in relation to it rushed together in his mind. He might have said with Goethe: 'After long labor in piling up fuel and straw, I have often tried in vain to warm myself . . . until at last the spark catches all of a sudden, and the whole

is wrapped in flame.' It is this flame which shines forth from 'Hamlet,' shooting up so high and glowing so red that to this day it fascinates all eyes.

"Hamlet" assumes madness in order to lull the suspicions of the man who has murdered his father and wrongfully usurped his throne; but under this mask of madness he gives evidence of rare intelligence, deep feeling, peculiar subtlety, mordant satire, exalted irony, and penetrating knowledge of human nature."

Brandes asserts that it cost Shakespeare no effort to transform himself into Hamlet. On the contrary, in giving expression to Hamlet's spiritual life he was enabled to quite naturally pour forth all that during recent years had filled his heart and seethed in his brain. He could let this creation drink in his inmost heart's blood; he could transfer to it the throbbing of his own pulses. Behind its forehead he could hide his melancholy; on its tongue he could lay his wit; its eyes he could cause to glow and lighten with flashes of his own spirit.

It came almost as a matter of course, that when the tercentenary of the death of Shakespeare was solemnized throughout the civilized world on April 23, 1916, and a performance of *Hamlet* was given at the very Castle of Elsinore in the presence of the Royal Danish family and the entire literary and artistic community of Copenhagen, the task of delivering the introductory address on that important day fell to Georg Brandes. His *William Shakespeare* had long before become a stand-

ard work to which Shakespearean students looked for that intimate information which Brandes supplies so plenteously. It need hardly be said that what he then had to tell about the Hamlet character and its creator was in entire accord with his reputation as orator.

As we proceed with this critic to a further examination of Hamlet's character the psychological aspect comes strongly into view. "Though there are in *Hamlet* more direct utterances of the poet's inmost spiritual life than in any of his earlier works," we read, "he has none the less succeeded in thoroughly disengaging his hero's figure, and making it an independent entity. What he gave him of his own nature was its unfathomable depth; for the rest, he retained the situation and the circumstances much as he found them in his authorities. . . . The figure of *Hamlet*, as it at last shaped itself in Shakespeare's imagination, and came to life in his drama, is one of the few immortal figures of art and poetry, which, like Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, exactly its contemporary, and Goethe's *Faust* of two centuries later, present to generation after generation problems to brood over and enigmas to solve."

What about Hamlet in his relation to Ophelia? Here Brandes is quite definite. "There is nothing more profoundly conceived in this play," he declares, "than the Prince's relation to Ophelia. Hamlet is genius in love—genius with its great demands and its highly unconventional conduct. He does not love like Romeo, with a love that takes entire pos-

session of his mind. He has felt himself drawn to Ophelia while his father was still in life, has sent her letters and gifts, and thinks of her with infinite tenderness; but she has it not in her to be his friend and confidante. . . . Hamlet draws away from Ophelia from the moment when he feels himself the appointed minister of a sacred revenge. In deep grief he bids her farewell without a word, grasps her wrist, holds it at arm's length from him, 'peruses' her face as if he would draw it—then shakes her arm gently, nods his head thrice, and departs with a 'piteous' sigh.

"If after this he shows himself hard, almost cruel, to her, it is because she was weak and tried to deceive him. She is a soft, yielding creature, with no power of resistance; a loving soul, but without the passion which gives strength. She resembles Desdemona in the unwisdom with which she acts towards her lover, but falls far short of her in warmth and resoluteness of affection. She does not in the least understand Hamlet's grief over his mother's conduct. She observes his depression without divining its cause."

It is the opinion of Brandes that in depicting the relation between Faust and Gretchen, Goethe appropriated and reproduced many features of the relation between Hamlet and Ophelia. In both cases we have the tragic love-tie between genius and tender girlhood.

X.

How different the characterization in the case of Cleopatra. Coming fresh from his treat-

ment of Cordelia in *King Lear*, Shakespeare had seen in her the ideal which one's imagination reads on a young girl's white brow, and which the young girl herself hardly understands, much less realizes. She was the ray of white light—the great, clear, symbol of the purity and nobility of heart which were expressed in her very name. He believed in her; he had looked into her innocent eyes, whose expression inspired him with the idea of her character.

"Cleopatra, on the contrary, O Cleopatra!" Brandes exclaims. Shakespeare, he says, "passed before his eyes the most feminine, and therefore the most dangerous, woman he had known since he gained a footing in London, and he gave her the grace of the one, the caprices of another, the teasing humor of a third, a fourth's instability; but deep in his heart he was thinking of one only, who had been to him all women in one, a mistress in the art of love and of awakening love, inciting to it as no other incited, and faithlessly betraying as no other betrayed—true and false, daring and frail, actress and lover without peer. . . .

"Assuming that it was Shakespeare's design in *Antony and Cleopatra*, as in *King Lear*, to evoke the conception of a world-catastrophe, we see that he could not in this play, as in *Macbeth* or *Othello*, focus the entire action around the leading characters alone. He could not even make the other characters completely subordinate to them; that would have rendered it impossible for him to give the im-

pression of majestic breadth, of an action embracing half of the then known world, which he wanted for the sake of the concluding effect. He required in the group of figures surrounding Octavius Caesar, and in the groups round Lepidus, Ventidius, and Sextus Pompeius, a counterpoise to Antony's group. He required the placid beauty and Roman rectitude of Octavia as a contrast to the volatile, intoxicating Egyptian. He required Enobarbus to serve as a sort of chorus and introduce an occasional touch of irony amid the highflown passion of the play."

Shakespeare had found in his Plutarch the life of Marcus Antonius which at first he read out of curiosity, then with attention and later with emotion. Here was the real downfall of the Roman world. As Brandes tells it: "Not till now did he hear the final, fatal crash of the old world-republic. The might of Rome, stern, austere, shivered at the touch of Eastern voluptuousness. Everything sank, everything fell—character and will, dominions and principalities, men and woman. Everything was worm-eaten, serpent-bitten, poisoned by sensuality—everything tottered and collapsed. Defeat in Asia, defeat in Europe, defeat in Africa, on the Egyptian coast; then self-abandonment and suicide.

"Again a poison story like *Macbeth*. In *Macbeth*'s case the virus was ambition, in Antony's it was sensuality. But the story of Antony, with its far-reaching effects, was a very much weightier and more interesting subject than the story of the little barbarian Scottish king.

Macbeth was spiritually poisoned by his wife, a woman ambitious to bloodthirstiness, an abnormal woman, more masculine than her husband, almost a virago. She speaks of dashing out the brains of babes as of one of those venial offenses which one may commit on an emergency rather than break one's word, and she undertakes without a tremor to smear the faces of the murdered King's servants with his blood. What is Lady Macbeth to us? What's Hecuba to us? And what was this Hecuba now to Shakespeare?

"In a very different and more personal way did he feel himself attracted by Cleopatra. She poisons slowly, half-involuntarily, and in wholly feminine fashion, the faculty of rule, the generalship, the courage, the greatness of Antony, ruler of half the world—and her (Cleopatra) he (Shakespeare) knew. He knew her as we all know her, the woman of women, quintessentiated Eve, or rather Eve and the serpent in one—'My serpent of old Nile,' as Antony calls her. Cleopatra—the name meant beauty and fascination—it meant alluring sensuality combined with finished culture—it meant ruthless squandering of human life and happiness and the noblest powers. Here, indeed, was the woman who could intoxicate and undo a man, even the greatest; uplift him to such happiness as he had never known before, and then plunge him into perdition, and along with him that half of the world which it was his to rule."

Women, according to Plutarch, were Antony's bane. After a youth in which many women

had had a share, he married Fulvia, the widow of the notorious tribune, Clodius. She acquired the mastery over him, and bent him to all her wishes, so that from her hand he passed into Cleopatra's, ready broken-in to feminine dominion.

Brandes feels that Arthur Symonds carries his enthusiasm too far when he writes that "*Antony and Cleopatra* is the most wonderful, I think, of all Shakespeare's plays, and it is so mainly because the figure of Cleopatra is the most wonderful of Shakespeare's women. And not of Shakespeare's women only, but perhaps the most wonderful of women." And yet, Brandes himself declares that "the great attraction of this masterpiece lies in the unique figure of Cleopatra, elaborated as it is with all Shakespeare's human experience and artistic enthusiasm. But the greatness of the world-historic drama proceeds from the genius with which he has entwined the private relations of the two lovers with the course of history and the fate of the empires. Just as Antony's ruin results from his connection with Cleopatra, so does the fall of the Roman Republic result from the contact of the simple hardihood of the West with the luxury of the East. Antony is Rome, Cleopatra is the Orient. When he perishes, a prey to the voluptuousness of the East it seems as though Roman greatness and the Roman Republic expired with him. Not Caesar's ambition, not Caesar's assassination, but this crumbling to pieces of Roman greatness fourteen years later brings home to us the ultimate fall of the old world-republic, and

impresses us with that sense of 'universal annihilation' which in this play, as in *King Lear*, Shakespeare aims at begetting.

"This is no tragedy of a domestic, limited nature like the conclusion of *Othello*; there is no Fortinbras here, as in *Hamlet*, giving the promise of brighter and better times to come; the victory of Octavius brings glory to no one and promises nothing. No; the final picture is that which Shakespeare was bent on painting the moment he felt himself attracted by this great theme—the picture of a world-catastrophe."

XI.

Of feminine types in Shakespeare of a far different order than the one to which Cleopatra belonged, most are of the period when *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night* sprang from this most fertile brain. All of these plays were written between 1599 and 1608. Brandes believes that Shakespeare had entered the stage in his career when all seemed sunshine and that he had never produced with such rapidity and ease as in this bright and happy interval. In *As You Like it* the roving spirit has awakened in his breast—the spirit which in bygone days sent him wandering with his gun through Charlcote Park, a life of hunting and song, and simple repasts in the open air, accompanied by witty talk; and at the same time a life full to the brim with the dreamy happiness of love. And with this life, the crea-

tion of his roving spirit, his gaiety and his longing for nature, he animates a fantastic Forest of Arden.

This is how the feminine characters are analyzed by Brandes: "The two cousins, Rosalind and Celia, seem at first glance like variations of the two cousins, Beatrice and Hero, in the play which Shakespeare has just finished. Rosalind and Beatrice in particular are akin in their victorious wit. Yet the difference between them is very great; Shakespeare never repeats himself. The wit of Beatrice is aggressive and challenging; we see, as it were, the gleam of a rapier in it. Rosalind's wit is gaiety without a sting; the gleam in it is of that sweet radiance which Oehlenschlaeger attributed to Freia; her sportive nature masks the depth of her love. Beatrice can be brought to love because she is a woman, and stands in no respect apart from her sex; but she is not of an amatory nature. Rosalind is seized with a passion for Orlando the instant she sets eyes on him. From the moment of Beatrice's first appearance she is defiant and combative, in the highest of spirits. We are introduced to Rosalind as a poor bird with a drooping wing; her father is banished, she is bereft of her birthright, and is living on sufferance as companion to a usurper's daughter, being, indeed, half a prisoner in the palace, where till lately she reigned as princess. It is not until she has donned the doublet and hose, appears in the likeness of a page, and wanders of her own sweet will in the open air and the greenwood, that she recovers her radiant humor,

and roguish merriment flows from her lips like the trilling of a bird. . . .

"What Rosalind says of women in general applies to herself in particular: you will never find her without an answer until you find her without a tongue. And there is always a bright and merry fantasy in her answers. She is literally radiant with youth, imagination and the joy of loving so passionately and being so passionately beloved."

In *Twelfth Night*, we read, the notes of seriousness and raillery, of passion, of tenderness and of laughter, blend in the richest and fullest concord. It is like a symphony in which no strain can be dispensed with, or like a picture veiled in a golden haze, into which all the colors resolve themselves.

"This comedy is connected by certain filaments with its predecessor, *As You Like It*, Brandes affirms. "The passion which Viola, in her male attire, awakens in Olivia, reminds us of that with which Rosalind inspires Phebe. But the motive is quite differently handled. While Rosalind gaily and unfeelingly repudiates Phebe's burning love, Viola is full of tender compassion for the lady whom her disguise has led astray. . . . The central character in *Twelfth Night* is Viola, of whom her brother does not say a word too much when, thinking that she has been drowned, he exclaims: 'She bore a mind that envy could not but call fair! . . . But the passion which possesses her makes her a more eloquent messenger of love than she designs to be. To Olivia's question as

to what she would do if she loved her as her master does, she answers:

Make me a willow cabin at your gate,
And call upon my soul within the house;
Write loyal cantons of contemned love,
And sing them loud even in the dead of night;
Holla your name to the reverberate hills,
And make the babbling gossip of the air
Cry out, Olivia! O! you should not rest
Between the elements of air and earth,
But you should pity me.

"In short, if she were a man, she would display all the energy which the Duke lacks. No wonder that, against her own will, she awakens Olivia's love. She herself as a woman, is condemned to passivity; her love is wordless, deep, and patient. In spite of her sound understanding, she is a creature of emotion. It is a very characteristic touch when, in the scene where Antonio, taking her for Sebastian, recalls the services he has rendered, and begs for assistance in his need, she exclaims that there is nothing, not even 'lying vainness, babbling drunkenness, or any taint of vice,' that she hates as much as ingratitude. However bright her intelligence, her soul from first to last outshines it. Her incognito, which does not bring her joy as it does to Rosalind, but only trouble and sorrow, conceals the most delicate womanliness. She never, like Rosalind or Beatrice, utters an audacious or wanton word. Her heart-winning charm more than makes up for the high spirits and sparkling humor of the earlier heroines. She is healthful and beautiful, like these her somewhat elder sisters; and she has also their humorous eloquence, as

she proves in her first scene with Olivia. Yet there rests upon her lovely figure a tinge of melancholy. She is an impersonation of that 'farewell to mirth' which an able English critic discerns in this last comedy of Shakespeare's brightest years.

XII.

A time arrives when Shakespeare no longer writes comedies, but sends a train of gloomy tragedies across the boards which so lately echoed the laughter of Beatrice and Rosalind. It is in the tragedy of *Julius Caesar* that Georg Brandes considers Shakespeare not wholly fair to the great Roman. He declares on this point: "What attracted Shakespeare to this theme? The play is called *Julius Caesar*, but it was obviously not Caesar himself that attracted Shakespeare. The true hero of the piece is Brutus; he it is who has aroused the poet's fullest interest. We must explain to ourselves the why and wherefore.

"The answer is to be found in the point of time at which the play was written. It was that eventful year when Shakespeare's earliest friends among the great, Essex and Southampton, had set on foot their foolish conspiracy against Elizabeth, and when their attempted insurrection had ended in the death of one, the imprisonment of the other. He had seen how proud and nobly-disposed characters might easily be seduced into political error, and tempted to rebellion, on the plea of independence. It is true that there was little enough

resemblance of detail between the mere palace-revolution designed by Essex, which should free him from the Queen's incalculable caprices, and the attempt of the Roman patricians to liberate an aristocratic republic, by assassination, from the yoke of a newly-founded despotism. The point of resemblance lay in the mere fact of the imprudent and ill-starred attempt to effect a subversion of public order."

Shakespeare, according to Brandes, having so arranged his drama that Brutus should be its tragic hero, had to concentrate his art on placing him in the foreground, and making him fill the scene. The difficulty was not to let his lack of political insight—in the cast of Antony—or of practical sense—his quarrel with Cassius,—detract from the impression of his superiority. He had to be the centre and pivot of everything, and therefore Caesar was diminished and belittled to such a degree, unfortunately, that this matchless genius in war and statesmanship has become a miserable caricature, the Danish critic avers.

Brandes has very little good to say of Brutus. But Brutus was already in Plutarch the protagonist of the Caesar tragedy. Shakespeare followed the course of history as presented by Plutarch. As for Antony's oration, here Brandes thinks Shakespeare rose to the highest art as a dramatist. That "Julius Caesar" was received by the London public with acclaim there is indisputable evidence. The learned rejoiced in the breath of air from ancient Rome which met them in these scenes, and the populace was

entertained and fascinated by the striking events and heroic characters of the drama.

As already referred to, the theme of *Julius Caesar* seemed to have attracted Shakespeare on account of the analogy between the conspiracy against Caesar and the conspiracy against Elizabeth. Despite the foolish precipitancy of their action, the leaders of this conspiracy, men like Essex and his comrade Southampton, had Shakespeare's full sympathy; and he transferred some of that sympathy to Brutus and Cassius. He created Brutus under the deeply imprinted conviction that unpractical magnanimity, like that of his noble friends, is unfitted to play an effective part in the drama of history and that errors of policy revenge themselves at least as sternly as moral delinquencies.

But let us pass on to another character where Shakespeare displays a mood so much at variance with what elsewhere he had shown when dealing with the opposite sex.

"Shakespeare, who had hitherto worshipped women, has become a misogynist," declares Brandes in speaking of *Troilus and Cressida*. And he continues: "This mood, forgotten since his early youth, rises up again in hundredfold strength, and his very soul overflows in scorn for the sex. What is the cause? Has anything befallen him—anything new? Of what and whom does he think? Does he speak out of new and recent experience, or is it the old sorrow from the time of the Sonnets, of which he made use in the construction of Cleopatra's character, and is this the same grief which has

taken new shape in his mind and is turning sour? Is it this which has grown increasingly bitter until it corrodes? . . .

"We can imagine that Shakespeare began by worshipping his lady-love, complaining of her coldness and hardness, celebrating her fingers in song, cursing her faithlessness, and feeling himself driven nearly wild with grief at the false position in which she had placed him: this is the standpoint of the Sonnets. In the course of years the fever has stormed itself out, but the memory of the enchantment was still visibly fresh, and his mind pictured the loved one as a marvelous phenomenon, half queen, half gipsy, alluring and repellant, true and false, strong and weak, a siren and a mystery; this is the standpoint of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Then, possibly, when life had sobered him down, when he had cooled, as we all do cool in the hardening ice of experience, he suddenly and sharply realized the insanity of an exotic enthusiasm for so worthless an object. He looks upon this condition, which invariably begins with self-deception and must of necessity end in disillusionment, as a disgraceful and tremendous absurdity; and his wrath over wasted feelings and wasted time and suffering, over the degradation and humiliation of its self-deception and ultimately the treason itself, seeks final and supreme relief in the outburst, 'What a farce!' which is in itself the germ of *Troilus and Cressida*.

XIII.

Before discussing the play further, Brandes has a colorful chapter dealing with Shakespeare and Homer, as bearing upon the subject matter of *Troilus and Cressida*. "It is clear," he remarks, "that the Christian conception of faithlessness in love has displaced the old Hellenic innocence and naïveté. How fervant is Achilles's love for Briseis in Homer; how honest, warm and indignant he is when he asks Agamemnon's messengers if among the children of men only the Atrides love their wives, and he himself answers that every man who is brave and of good understanding loves and shelters his wife, as he of his inmost heart loved and would shelter Briseis, prisoner of war through she was. . . Contrast this with the burlesque attempt to provoke that cowardly snob and raw dunce of an Achilles out of his exclusiveness, by passing him by without returning his greeting or seeming conscious of his existence; this same Achilles, who falls upon Hector with his myrmidons and scoundrelly murders him, just as the hero, wearied by battle, has taken off his helmet and laid aside his sword. It reads like the invention of a mediaeval barbarian.

"But Shakespeare is neither mediaeval nor a barbarian. No, he has written it down out of a bitterness so deep that he has felt hero-worship, like love, to be an illusion of the senses. As the phantasy of first love is absurd, and Troilus' loyalty towards its object ridiculous, so is the honor of our forefathers and of war in general a delusion. Shakespeare now

suspects the most assured reputations; he believes that if Achilles really lived at all, he was most probably a stupid and vainglorious boaster, just as Helen must have been a hussy by no means worthy of the turmoil which was made about her. As he distorted Achilles into an absurdity, so he wrenched all other personalities into caricatures."

But what about Cressida? Brandes makes this answer: "Shakespeare deliberately made Cressida sensually attractive, but spiritually repulsive and unclean. She has desire for Troilus, but no love. She is among those who are born experienced; she knows how to inflame, win and keep men enchained, but the honorable love of a man is useless to her. At the same time she is one of those who easily find a master. Any man who is not imposed upon by her airs, who sees through her mock prudish rebuffs, subdues her without difficulty. . . . Cressida is never modest even when she is most prudish; she understands a jest, even bold and libertine ones, and she will bandy them with enjoyment. With all her kittenish charm she is uninteresting, and, in spite of her hot blood, she betrays the coldest selfishness. She is neither ridiculous nor unlovely, but as little is she beautiful; in no other of Shakespeare's characters is the sensual attraction of a woman so completely shorn of its poetry."

Of all Shakespeare's works it is perhaps *Troilus and Cressida* which most nearly approaches *Don Quixote* of Cervantes. There is besides, a chivalrous fine feeling and sensual

tenderness in Troilus's love, but the melancholy of Shakespeare's matured perception sets its iron teeth in everything at this period of his life, and he looks upon absorption in love as senseless and laughable. As Brandes expresses it: "He shows us how blindly Troilus runs into the snare, giddy with happiness and uplifted to the heavens, and how the next moment he awakes from this intoxication, betrayed; but he shows it without sympathy, coldly. Therefore, the play never once arouses any true emotion, since Troilus himself never really interests. The piece blazes out, but imparts no warmth. Shakespeare wrote it thus, and therefore, while *Troilus and Cressida* will find many readers who will admire it, few will love it."

XIV.

It has not been the intention of the present writer in his efforts to show how Georg Brandes interprets Shakespeare, to deal with each of the plays. Such a task within a limited compass would be fair to neither Brandes nor the Bard of Avon. The purpose has been, however, to aid in making this Danish critic's work better known in America. The year 1923 seems to be particularly suited for such a presentation since Shakespeare once more occupies the public mind more largely than at any time since the tercentenary of his death, in 1916. For it was in this year, three hundred years ago, it is said, that the First Folio was published. Modern research tends to show that it was in all probability William Jaggard of

Fleet Street who published the First Folio and that the editors were John Hemmings and Henry Condell, fellow actors with Shakespeare, who were church wardens at Bradbury in 1623. They signed the dedication to the Earls of Pembroke and Montgomery and they gave assurance to the readers of that day that the versions of the thirty-six plays they presented—twenty for the first time—were not stolen or maimed, but perfect in their numbers.

It is not to be wondered, then, that Stratford-on-Avon made much of Shakespeare's birthday in this year of the tercentenary of the First Folio, nor that London joined in. Since this account concerns itself largely with Georg Brandes as an interpreter of Shakespeare, we shall perhaps be justified in quoting him in this matter of the First Folio, as follows: "He seems never to have sanctioned any publication, or to have read a single proofsheets. The 1623 folio of his plays, issued after his death by two of his actor-friends, purports to be printed 'according to the True Original Copies,' but this assertion is demonstrably false in numerous instances in which we can test it—where the folio, that is to say, presents a simple reprint, often with additional blunders, of the old pirated quartos, which must have been based either on the surreptitious notes of stenographers or on prompt-copies dishonestly acquired."

It will be for other Shakespeare scholars, those upholding the genuineness of the First Folio, to accept the challenge of Georg Brandes in this matter. With his usual fearlessness in

contravening the most cherished traditions, no matter what they may be, so long as he considers himself justified to do so, Brandes simply says what he thinks on this point. The present writer cannot escape the obligation to make mention of it since such a statement by the noted Danish critic is included in the *William Shakespeare, A Critical Study*.

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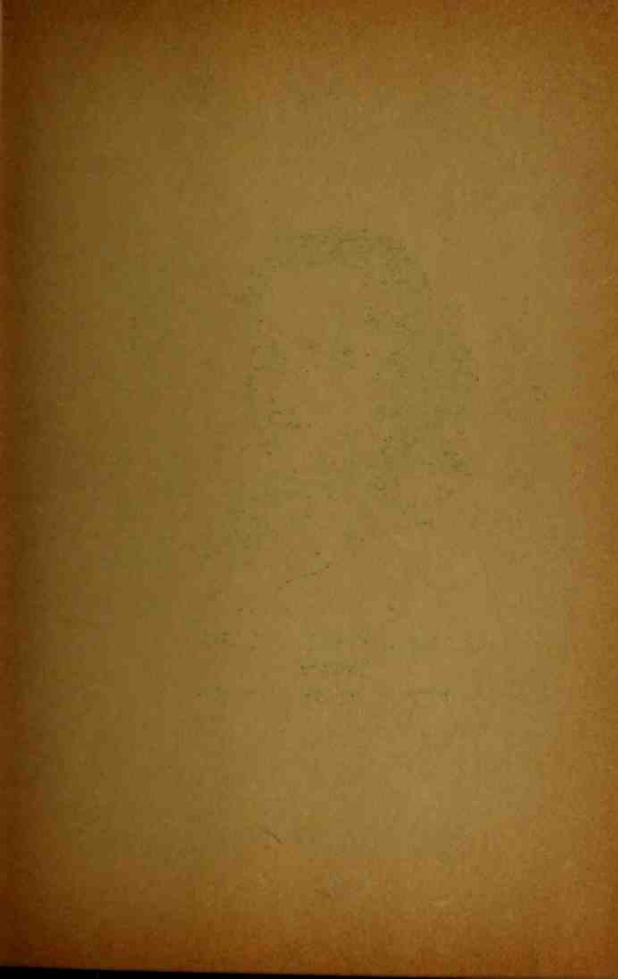
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